Amendments to the Claims

This listing of the Claims will replace all prior listings and versions of the Claims in the application.

Listing of the Claims

Claim 1 (currently amended)   A method of providing a system for selective communication of promotional information among a plurality of sponsors and a plurality of users over a computer network comprising the acts of:

a)   enrolling a plurality of sponsors, the act of enrolling each sponsor comprising the act of assigning the sponsor with at least one group of customization parameters which are sufficient to uniquely define the look and feel of a value portal skin;

b)   providing a sponsor server software in computer useable form to at least one of the plurality of sponsors, wherein the sponsor server software executing on a sponsor server comprises functionality for communicating messages with a client software on a user's computer over the computer network according to a special communication protocol;

c)   providing the client software to a plurality of users in machine useable form, each of said plurality of users having a user's computer capable of using the client software and having access to the computer network, wherein each user's computer operates under an operating system having a graphical user interface with a task bar thereon, and wherein the client software when executing on a user's computer comprises

   i)   functionality for installing a value portal on the user's computer, the look and feel of the value portal capable of being defined by any of the unique group of customization parameters defining a value portal skin which have been assigned to each of the plurality of sponsors,

   ii)   functionality for providing access to a plurality of additional utilitarian application programs through said value portal,

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iii) a system database capable of storing a plurality of groups of customization parameters, said system database comprising at least one group of customization parameters therein corresponding to at least one sponsor of said plurality of sponsors,

iv) functionality for choosing which group of customization parameters from the plurality of groups of customization parameters in the system database will be used to define the look and feel of the value portal,

v) functionality for exchanging messages with at least one sponsor through communication with a sponsor server operated by the sponsor server software, according to the special communication protocol,

vi) functionality for displaying messages on the value portal, [[and]] functionality for registering a user with a sponsor server executing the sponsor server software, and

vii) functionality for allowing a user to select which sponsors' value portal skin to display, whereby the user chooses which sponsors to receive marketing messages from.

Claim 2 (original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the act of providing at least one authentication server operating with an authentication server software accessible to the computer network, said authentication server being capable of authenticating a communication between one of said plurality of user's computers operating the client software and a sponsor server operating the sponsor server software communicating according to the special communication protocol.

Claim 3 (original) The method of claim 2 wherein the plurality of additional utilitarian application programs are accessible only when the client software is operating on a user's computer, whereby regular use of the software is promoted.

Claim 4 (original) The method of claim 3 wherein the functionality of the plurality of utilitarian application programs is invariant to which group of customization parameters defines the value port skin.

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Claim 5 (original) The method of claim 4 wherein the client software further comprises functionality for periodically accessing at least one sponsor server to obtain messages according to the special communication protocol.

Claim 6 (original) The method of claim 5 wherein the client software further comprises functionality for optionally updating the client software program and system database on a user's computer during a communication according to the special message protocol

Claim 7 (original) The method of claim 6 wherein the value portal is installed overlaying the task bar on the graphical user interface.

Claim 8 (original) The method of claim 6 wherein the value portal is installed adjacent to the task bar on the graphical user interface.

Claim 9 (original) The method of claim 6 wherein the client software launches an application program with the value portal included thereon.

Claim 10 (original) The method of claim 6 wherein the client software, the sponsor server software, and the special message protocol contain functionality to enable a first user to exchange a message with a second user through a common sponsor server which both the first user and the second user periodically exchange messages.

Claim 11 (currently amended) A client software on a computer readable medium for operation on a user's computer comprising:
a) functionality for installing a value portal on a user's computer, the took and feel of the value portal capable of being defined by a group of customization parameters defining a value portal skin which have been assigned to a sponsor;
b) functionality for providing access to a plurality of additional utilitarian application programs through said value portal;

c) a system database capable of storing a plurality of groups of customization parameters, said system database comprising at least one group of customization parameters therein corresponding to at least one sponsor;

d) functionality for choosing which group of customization parameters from the plurality of groups of customization parameters in the system database will be used to define the look and feel of the value portal;

e) functionality for exchanging messages with at least one sponsor through communication with a sponsor server operated by a sponsor server software, according to a special communication protocol;

f) functionality for displaying messages on the value portal; [[and]]

g) functionality for registering a user with a sponsor server executing the sponsor serve software, wherein the sponsor server software comprises functionality for communicating with the user's computer executing the client software when operating the sponsor server software; and

h) functionality for allowing a user to select which sponsors' value portal skin to display, whereby the user can choose which sponsors to receive marketing messages from.

Claim 12 (original) The client software of claim 11 wherein the plurality of additional utilitarian application programs are accessible only when the client software is operating on a user's computer, whereby regular use of the software is promoted.

Claim 13 (original) The client software of claim 12 wherein the functionality of the plurality of utilitarian application programs is invariant to which group of customization parameters defines the value portal skin.

Claim 14 (original) The client software of claim 13 wherein the client software further comprises functionality for periodically accessing at least one sponsor server to obtain messages according to the special communication protocol.

Claim 15 (original)   The client software of claim 14 wherein the client software further comprises functionality for optionally updating the client software program and system database on a user's computer during a communication according to the special communication protocol.

Claim 16 (original)   The client software of claim 15 wherein the value portal is installed overlaying the task bar on the graphical user interface.

Claim 17 (original)   The client software of claim 15 wherein the value portal is installed adjacent to the task bar on the graphical user interface.

Claim 18 (original)   The client software of claim 15 wherein the client software launches an application program with the value portal included thereon.

Claim 19 (original)   A sponsor server software on a computer readable medium which is capable of communicating with the client software of claim 15 according to the special communications protocol.

Claim 20 (currently amended)   A system for selective communication of promotional information among a
plurality of sponsors and a plurality of users over a computer network comprising:
a)   at least one sponsor server accessible over the computer network;
b)   sponsor server software operating said at least one sponsor server;
c)   a plurality of user's computers, having access to the computer network and operating under control of an operating system with a graphical interlace having a task bar thereon;
d)   client software operating each of the plurality of user's computers said client software comprising
   i)   functionality for installing a value portal, the look and feel of the value portal capable of being defined by a group of customization parameters defining a value portal skin which has been assigned to

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a sponsor,

ii)   functionality for providing access to a plurality of additional utilitarian application programs through said value portal,

iii)   a system database capable of storing a plurality of groups of customization parameters, said database comprising at least one group of customization parameters therein corresponding to at least one of said plurality of sponsors,

iv)   functionality for choosing which group of customization parameters from the at least one group of customization parameters in the system database which will be used to define the look and feel of the value portal,

v)   functionality for exchanging messages with the at least one sponsor server,

vi)   functionality for displaying messages on the value portal, [[and]]

vii)   functionality for registering each of the plurality of users with the at least one sponsor server, and

viii)   functionality for allowing a user to select which sponsors' value portal skin to display, whereby the user can choose which sponsors to receive marketing messages from; and

e)   a special communication protocol by which a user's computer system operated by the client software can exchange messages with the at least one sponsor server operated by the sponsor server software, said special communication protocol implemented in software operating on the at least one sponsor server and the plurality of user's computers.

Claim 21 (original)   The system of claim 20 further comprising at least one authentication server operating with authentication server software capable of authenticating one of said plurality of user's computers to the at least one sponsor server according to the special communication protocol.

Claim 22 (original)   The system of claim 21 wherein the computer network is the Internet.

Claim 23 (original)   The system of claim 22 wherein the at least one sponsor server comprises a plurality of sponsor servers which are each operated by at least one sponsor.

Claim 24 (original)   The system of claim 23 wherein the plurality of additional utilitarian programs are accessible only when the client software program is operating, and the functionality of the plurality of utilitarian programs is invariant to selection of which group of customization parameters defines the look and feel of a value portal, whereby regular use of the client software is encouraged.

Claim 25 (original)   The system of claim 24 wherein the communications protocol further comprises functionality for updating the client software program and system database on a user's computer during a communication session with a sponsor server.

Claim 26 (original)   The system of claim 25 wherein the sponsor server software, the client software, and the special communications protocol provide functionality for a first user's computer and a second user's computer to exchange a message through a common sponsor server which both the first user and second user periodically exchange messages according to the special communications protocol.

Claim 27 (original)   The system of claim 25 wherein the value portal installed by the client software is installed overlaying the task bar on the graphical user interface.

Claim 28 (original)   The system of claim 25 wherein the value portal installed by the client software is installed adjacent to the task bar on the graphical user interface.

Claim 29 (original)   The system of claim 25 wherein the value portal installed by the client software is installed within an application program launched by the client software.

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Claim 30 (currently amended)   . [[The]] A personalized dynamically variable virtual network accessible to one of the plurality of user's computers in the system of claim 26 comprising the at least one authentication server, the sponsor servers with which the one user's computer exchanges messages, and the user's computers which exchange messages with the sponsor servers which the one user's computer exchanges messages.